

CONCOW PYRODIVERSITY PROJECT

PALS# 59322

PROPOSAL

Background Concow Basin is subject to some of the most extreme fire weather in California. Since the 2018 Camp Fire, CAL FIRE has partnered with the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Sierra Pacific Industries, Butte County Fire Safe Council, Butte County Resource Conservation District, and the local community to plan how to handle the explosive fuels regrowth we knew from experience would follow. We know that if we don't aggressively control fuels, the next catastrophic fire is ten years away. The result is the design of workable and strategic "burn pods" which can break up the brush regrowth around Concow and reduce future fire intensity while also improving wildlife habitat.

Two wildfires have impacted the proposed treatment areas, one in 2008 and the other in 2018. As a consequence of those wildfires, the landscape is at risk to type conversion, with current vegetative trajectories expected to exhibit vast, contiguous brushlands. Prior to the Camp Fire of 2018, the basin's vegetative composition included chaparral, black oak woodland, mixed oak woodland, and Sierran-mixed conifer. As a result of the Camp Fire, much of the project area experienced a basal area reduction of 75% or greater; there has been minimal to no conifer regeneration.

The prescribed fire treatment units proposed are several hundred acres in size, with burning events anticipated to be performed every three-to-five-years (based on ecological monitoring results). The units identified for treatment have been collaboratively planned since December of 2018. The treatments proposed intend to approach traditional cultural fire return intervals. The prescriptions have been explicitly designed to complement and enhance the habitat restoration/reforestation initiatives already underway in the basin.

Proposed Project Location The area is located within the wildland-urban interface adjacent to the community of Concow, about 25 miles from the City of Oroville, CA (Figure 1). Portions of Mount Diablo Meridian, Township 23 N., Range 04 E., Sections 24 and 36 and T. 23 N., R. 05 E., Sections 19, 29-31.

Proposed Project Action and Description We propose to perform prescribed fire treatments as a forest restoration strategy aimed at increasing wildfire resilience:

- Creating Fuel Break(s) (1180) vegetative treatments to change fuel characteristics in such a way that expected fire behavior would be reduced;
- Prescribed Burning activities (aerial ignitions) where fire is applied to the majority or all of an area within well-defined boundaries for reduction of fuel hazard (1111) or low intensity (1113) for consuming surface fuels, but not the overstory canopy. Ladder fuels can be consumed or scorched. Includes ecosystem burning;
- Fireline Construction (1140) part of a control line that is scraped or dug to mineral soil;

- Thinning of Hazardous Fuels (1160) selective felling of trees and shrubs for non-commercial hazardous fuels reduction purposes only;
- Yarding (1120) removal of fuels by carrying or dragging;
- Burning of Piled Material (1130) burning of piled material including hand and machine piles and decks.
- Treat areas nearby people, property, and roads (e.g. Pulga) with Compacting or Crushing of Fuels (1152) any crushing, mowing, mulching, or other treatment that grinds or shreds fuels, leaving resulting material on the forest floor to rearrange fuels and speed up decomposition;
- Fuels Grazing (1139) grazing used specifically for hazardous fuels management; and
- The project will include road improvements and maintenance (9007, 9008) to existing roads.

Purpose of Action To improve habitat and public safety by applying the best available scientific information to restore ecological integrity, including the restoration of structure, function, composition, and connectivity. To sustain habitat values and to reduce the likelihood of another stand replacing fire, and to restore fire return intervals by implementing prescribed fire strategically across large cross-boundary stands.

This project to reintroduce large-scale burning to Concow Basin works hand-in-hand with founder stand “pyrosilviculture” treatments authorized in the Concow Resilience Project (PALS #57311).

Need for Action Section 605, of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) authorizes hazardous fuels reduction projects that reduce the risk or extent of, or increase the resilience to, wildfires.

Additional Information The project is anticipated to have a decision in late summer, 2021 and implementation can begin as early as fall 2021. Please provide comments to Clay Davis, clay.davis@usda.gov; or Thibault Hoppe-Glosser, thibault@bcrd.org